DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 204 893 EC 133 360

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TITLE The Importance of "Opportunity to Respond" in the Education of the Black Minority Student.
PUB DATE Feb 81
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at The Council for Exceptional Children Conference on The Exceptional Black Child (New Orleans, LA, February, 1981, Session M-18).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; *Behavior Change; *Black Students; Disadvantaged Youth; Elementary Secondary Education; Inner City; *Intervention; *Learning Disabilities; Minority Groups; Program Descriptions; Reading Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Juniper Gardens Childrens Project; Response Opportunities

ABSTRACT

Based on findings on the Juniper Gardens Children's Project (a community based research program to increase the reading skills of learning disabled inner city children), the paper presents research and preliminary classroom observations which point to the importance of providing an environment which allows Black minority inner city students to make academic responses. The premise is set forth that the learning disabled minority child may be one who begins school with less educational experience from the home, and falls further and further behind over the grades due to low levels of active academic response time as structured by the teacher and classroom. One aspect of the program involves using parents to listen and deliver praise to their children. (SB)

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ED204893

The Importance of "Opportunity to Respond" in the Education of the Black Minority Student

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April, 1981

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The Importance of "Opportunity to Respond" in the Education of the Black Minority Student

Joe Delquadri and Charles Greenwood

The purpose of this symposium is to describe a series of intervention and treatment packages that have been developed and used successfully with disadvantaged, minority, and low achieving children at the Juniper Gardens Children's Project. Juniper Gardens is a community-based research program sponsored by the Bureau of Child Research, the Department of Human Development, and the Department of Special Education at the University of Kansas. It is located in the inner-city area of Kansas City, Kansas. Over the past 15 years, under the direction of R. Vance Hall, the staff and students of Juniper Gardens have been involved in research and development of educational programs for minority children. During this time, over 180 articles have been published related to research and/or programs carried out in the schools and homes of these children. (e.g., Copeland, Brown, Axelrod, & Hall, 1972; Hall, 1971; Hall, Copeland & Clark, 1975; Hall, Lund, & Jackson, 1968; Harris & Hall, 1973; McKenzie, Clark, Wolf, Kothera, & Benson, 1968). The overall purpose of this research has been to find ways to prevent and/or remediate the high incidence of academic failure associated with inner-city poverty areas.

More recently, due to a three-year research program provided by BEH (Field Initiated Research Programs) through the office of Education, Juniper Gardens has been involved in experimentally developing learning packages. These programs have been designed to rapidly increase the reading skills of learning disabled minority children in order to assist their achievement in regular classrooms (i.e., mainstreaming) and to prepare them for regular classroom involvement.

The reading research has focused on increasing the minority child's "academic engaged time" or the level of opportunities to respond as provided by the school,

classroom, and teacher. An assumption inherent in this model is that while learning characteristics or "styles" are important considerations in educational programs for the children, that assessment, evaluation, and even diagnosis of the classroom ecological system and the extent to which it provides opportunities to learn are just as important, if not crucial, to the child's success. Thus, in programs directed to learning disabilities of minority children, the school is obligated to consider opportunities to respond in the classroom eco-structure as well as child traits and characteristics.

The Juniper Gardens Children's Project has completed many studies designed to increase appropriate social and academic behaviors of children and to give parents, teachers, and paraprofessionals skills for working more effectively with children. The initial emphasis in these studies has been on using systematic consequences and reinforcement to improve behavior. Increasingly, however, we have become aware of the added need to focus our efforts on ways to increase the opportunity for minority children to make academic responses as a key to remediation and prevention of learning disabilities.

The research findings and preliminary classroom observations that will be reported in this symposium indicate that perhaps a primary reason for the high incidence of learning disabilities and failure among minority students from inner-city areas is that the environment provides little opportunity for them to make academic responses. While this may seem obvious, it has not been a focus of research or instructional efforts in inner-city classrooms, nor for that matter, with low achievers who live outside inner-city areas.

The programs developed at Juniper Gardens and to be reported in this symposium are not the first to place emphasis on increasing academic response rates. In fact, a great deal of research has been carried out in this area. For example, Lovitt and Curtiss (1969a, 1969b, 1970) reported on procedures designed to increase academic responding. They too pointed out that the amount of reinforcement per se was not an overriding factor in increasing achievement. Rather,

schedules of reinforcement, antecedent events, and ecological arrangements including self-imposed (rather than teacher-imposed) contingencies were instrumental in bringing about increased response rates. Others have also stressed the importance of increasing "allotted time" and "academic learning time" in various subject areas (Bloom, 1974; Rosenshine & Berliner, 1978: Becker, 1977, 1978; Fisher, Filby, & Marliave, 1978). To date, however, little emphasis has been placed in teacher training programs, assessment, or in writing educational objectives which consider the need to provide students with increased opportunities to make frequent and correct academic responses.

There is a good deal of evidence to suggest that the major differences in achievement between students from low socio-economic areas and those from higher socio-economic areas may be found in the home environment and subsequently, the classroom setting. That is, that higher socio-economic pupils are more likely to receive more opportunities to practice academic skills at home than their inner-city counterparts. For example, it is not uncommon for pupils living in the suburbs to read aloud 50 to 100 books to their parents during the first grade. It <u>is</u> uncommon in the inner-city. Additionally, Greenwood, Delquadri, Terry, and Hall (in press) have shown, on the basis of observation data collected from representative samples of inner-city and suburban fourth-grade classrooms, that the average inner-city pupil would have to attend school six weeks longer during a school year to receive the same amount of instruction time as their more fortunate suburban peers. As will be shown in Dr. Stanley's presentation, the reasons for this are related to differences in ecological classroom arrangements, instructional programming, and different teaching styles. Thus, the learning disabled minority child may be one who begins school with less educational experience from the home, and falls further and further behind over the grades due to low levels of active academic response time as structured by the teacher and

classroom. Our research suggests that if an average child does not practice an educational activity to mastery in the classroom,that often times their parents will see to it that the necessary practice is provided at home. However, if the minority disadvantaged low achievers or learning disabled child does not get the practice in class, it simply is not done and the child fails to acquire mastery of that objective.

If the amount of academic responding by students in inner-city schools is indeed as low as our observation data has indicated (Greenwood, et al., 1981), it will be important to determine more fully the effects of increasing the pupils' opportunity to make responses. Once baseline rates of responding are measured, the effect of increasing those rates can be researched. Systems for doing so may include program procedures carried out by the teacher involving individual students, groups, or entire classrooms. Other systems involving paraprofessional, peer, or parent tutors should be investigated more fully. Individual analyses of curriculum materials as they relate to increased opportunities to respond, can now be accomplished due to the ground breaking technological development by researchers such as Lovitt (1976), Becker (1977), Elliott (1979), and Haring, Lovitt, Eaton & Hansen (1978). The papers to be presented by Gary Sasso, Debra Whorton, and Marleen Elliott will illustrate our approach to constructing instructional packages for parents, teachers, and the curriculum.

In the past, it has been thought that poverty area parents with low academic skills could not help their children. Our research has indicated, however, that parents or siblings with very low reading skills can effectively listen to children read for consistent periods of time. Even though they may be unable to provide specific phonics instruction, there is evidence that significant reading improvement results as a function of consistent practice by the student, and

listening and delivering praise by parents (Delquadri, Greenwood, & Hall, 1979). Furthermore, by keeping the practice sessions short (10 min or less) and free from negative feedback and counter-productive interaction, both parents and child are much more likely to maintain reading than if longer reading sessions and more punishing procedures of the parents own device are used (Delquadri, 1978). Based on several replications, our data has also shown that the procedures carried out by parents have immediate impact in the classroom, and that the impact is of sufficient intensity to be immediately perceptible by the teacher. This latter aspect tends to help maintain parent tutoring as the beneficial effect is being perceived by both parent and teacher (Delquadri, et al., 1979). Thus, by using parents we can increase the amount of daily directed reading practice from a few sec to at least 10 min. When this has been done, it is not surprising that reading gains follow.

Another important dimension of our program development is to find systems which will allow pupils to increase their responding, but will not be punishing to the teacher because of the heavy work load increased responding might impose. Such systems might be implemented by teachers for entire classroom groups or they might involve the use of paraprofessionals, peers, parents, or the students themselves as agents for providing more academic responding.

This aspect will be extremely important as we move to implement P.L. 94-142 and learn to place special children in the "least restrictive environment". We find it interesting that this mandate does not call for assessment of learning time and how the classroom environment contributes to a child's learning; and that assessment is typically based solely on the learner's characteristics (e.g., I.Q., achievement scores, reports of their behavior, etc.). Obviously, there is a great deal of variance among regular and special classrooms and teachers, with respect to the level of academic engaged time,that will be provided to an exceptional youngster. Yet, there is a paucity of evaluative instruments, data, and/or intervention procedures that describe or optimize this variable as we

move to develop IEP's and "mainstream" these children. The CISSAR observation system developed by Greenwood, Delquadri, and Hall (1978), to be described by Dr. Stanley, offers one approach to quantifying the instructional time generated in a classroom and the learning disabled child's level of instruction in that class, in comparison to other students and average peers.

We realize that many of the ideas to be suggested in this symposium are not new and that there are many creative teachers that have devised extremely effective low response-cost procedures which increase practice on key academic tasks. There are parents, most of whom live in the suburbs, that promote practice in academic skills at home. However, there are also many parents and teachers that have not focused on increasing active academic responding. We suggest therefore, that opportunity to respond is a critical factor not only to be considered by the researchers, but the teachers and parents as well.

This is also not to say that reinforcement models are not important. We have shown they are, over and over, and it cannot be neglected. However, at this point we are attempting to keep opportunity to respond at the forefront of our investigations. We hope that others in the field of special education will consider focusing on problems in this area also. It would appear to be an area of great potential both in terms of research and benefit for teachers, parents, and most important of all, the children.

FOOTNOTE

This research was carried out as a part of the Juniper Gardens Children's Project and was supported by Grant Number G007801878 from the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, Bureau of Child Research, Department of Human Development and Family Life and the School of Education, University of Kansas.

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